

## **Opening of New VA Outpatient Clinic**

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## **Vansant, Virginia**

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**March 8, 2010**

I am pleased to return to Vansant today to formally open a new VA outpatient clinic, which will provide convenient access to health care services for veterans in Buchanan County and the surrounding areas.

One of my highest priorities in representing Southwest Virginia is ensuring the availability of high quality, easily accessible health care for our region's veterans. To that end, I have worked successfully with the Department of Veterans Affairs in order to establish veterans outpatient clinics in communities throughout the Ninth District.

The clinic opening today in Vansant will be operated by the Johnson City VA Hospital. The Vansant clinic will be among several clinics opened in the region recently. VA-staffed outpatient clinics have opened in Bristol, Norton, Marion and Jonesville. Additionally, a new clinic will be located in Wytheville.

When veterans clinics are established, the Veterans Administration has traditionally contracted with local primary care clinics to provide health care services. The VA has chosen to provide services at the Vansant clinic directly rather than through a contract site.

The new clinic will be dedicated to serving only veterans and will be open Monday and Wednesday from 9:30 AM to 2:00 PM. A physician, a nurse and a patient services assistant will staff the clinic during those hours. The clinic includes two exam rooms and a laboratory and will provide primary care and lab services to patients. Any veteran enrolled for health care services will be eligible to receive services at the new clinic.

The location of veterans outpatient clinics throughout the Ninth District greatly enhances the ease with which our region's veterans can receive medical care. The Veterans Administration maintains hospitals in Salem, Virginia and in Johnson City, Tennessee.

The medical services provided through these hospitals are convenient for those Ninth District residents who reside within a short distance of one of the hospitals; however, for thousands of Ninth District veterans, a drive to one of the VA hospitals is anything but convenient.

For residents in some portions of Southwest Virginia the drive to and from a VA hospital can consume the better part of a day.

During the winter months, the commute is even more difficult due to snow and ice which accumulates more rapidly on mountainous roads.

The result of this inconvenience is that many veterans in the area simply forego receiving the primary medical care which promotes good health. Consequently, when veterans eventually visit the VA hospital, they may have developed a serious condition which could have been prevented altogether through the earlier application of routine primary care.

I have long suggested to the Veterans Administration that the provision of community-based primary care services is far more convenient for veterans and promotes better health among them than the former arrangement of requiring a drive to the VA hospitals to receive both primary and specialized care. The provision of community-based services would save the Veterans Administration money in the long run by promoting good health and lessening the number of serious illnesses the VA will eventually be required to treat.

I am pleased that the VA has responded to my suggestions and is now working to develop primary care outpatient clinics throughout our region. The opening of a new veterans outpatient clinic in Vansant is the result of our combined efforts to better meet the needs of our region's veterans.

Several individuals deserve our thanks today, and I would like to take this opportunity to recognize them.

I want to express my appreciation to Charlene Ehret, Director of the VA Medical Center at Johnson City, who has assisted me in advocating for the placement of veterans clinics throughout our region.

I would also like to thank Dr. Peter Torok, Associate Chief of Staff for Community Care, for his commitment to providing high quality health care to our nation's veterans. The location of the clinic in Vansant would not have been possible without Dr. Torok's excellent assistance.

I also want to thank Laura Lee, my Deputy Chief of Staff, for her persistence in working with the Veterans Administration toward the establishment of our community-based outpatient clinics for veterans.

Finally, I want to congratulate the veterans of this region who will benefit from the primary care services which will be offered in Vansant. A debt of gratitude is owed by our nation to all veterans. Once our armed forces have completed their service, we have a responsibility to our veterans to ensure that they have the best medical care in a convenient setting.